

Veterans' Benefits

A variety of programs and benefits is available to servicemembers and veterans of military service: disability payments, educational assistance, hospital and medical care, vocational rehabilitation, survivor and dependents benefits, special loan programs, and hiring preference for certain jobs. Most of the veterans programs are administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Monetary Benefits

Two major cash benefit programs are available for veterans. The first program provides benefits to veterans with service-connected disabilities and, on the veteran's death, benefits are paid to the eligible spouse and children. These benefits are not means tested—that is, they are payable regardless of other income or resources. The second program provides benefits to needy veterans who have nonservice-connected disabilities. These benefits are means tested.

Compensation for service-connected disabilities.—The disability compensation program pays monthly benefits to veterans whose disabilities resulted from injury or disease incurred while in or aggravated by active military duty, whether in wartime or peacetime. Individuals discharged or separated from military service under dishonorable conditions are not eligible for compensation payments. The amount of monthly compensation depends on the degree of disability, rated as the percentage of normal function lost. Payments in 1999 range from \$96 a month for a 10-percent disability to \$1,989 a month for total disability. Veterans who have at least a 30-percent service-connected disability are entitled to an additional dependents allowance. The amount is based on the number of dependents and degree of disability.

Pensions for non-service-connected disabilities.—Monthly benefits are provided to wartime

veterans with limited income and resources who are totally and permanently disabled because of a condition not attributable to their military service. To qualify for these pensions, a veteran must have served in one or more of the following designated war periods: The Mexican Border Period, World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Era, or the Gulf War. The period of service must have lasted at least 90 days, and the discharge or separation cannot have been dishonorable.

Effective December 1, 1998, maximum benefit amounts for non-service-connected disabilities range from \$731 per month for a veteran without a dependent spouse or child to \$1,447 per month for a veteran who is in need of regular aid and attendance and who has one dependent. For each additional dependent child, the pension is raised by \$124 per month.

Benefits for survivors.—The dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) program provides monthly benefits to the surviving spouse, children (under age 18, disabled, or students), and certain parents of service persons or veterans who die as the result of an injury or disease incurred while in or aggravated by active duty or training or from a disability otherwise compensable under laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Dependency and indemnity compensation payments may also be made if the veteran was receiving or was entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability at the time of death, and if certain conditions as to the severity of the disability are met.

Eligibility for survivor benefits based on a non-service-connected death of a veteran with a service-connected disability requires a marriage of at least a 1-year duration before the veteran's death. A surviving spouse is generally required to have lived continuously with the veteran from marriage until his or her death. Eligibility for benefits generally ends with the spouse's remarriage.

The monthly benefit amount payable

to surviving spouses of veterans who died before January 1, 1993, depends on the last pay rate of the deceased service person or veteran. In 1999, for pay grades E-1 through E-6, a flat monthly rate of \$861 is paid to surviving spouses. Monthly benefits for grades E-7 through E-9 range between \$896 and \$980. For veterans who died after January 1, 1993, surviving spouses receive a flat \$861 a month. An additional \$187 a month will be paid to supplement the basic rate if the deceased veteran had been entitled to receive 100-percent service-connected compensation for at least 8 years immediately preceding death. The amounts payable to eligible parents are lower and depend on: (1) The number of parents eligible, (2) their income, and (3) their marital status.

Pensions for non-service-connected death.—Pensions are paid based on need to surviving spouses and dependent children (under age 18, disabled, or students) of deceased veterans of the wartime periods specified in the disability pension program. For a pension to be payable, the veteran generally must have met the same service requirements established for the non-service-connected disability pension program, and the surviving spouse must meet the same marriage requirements as under the dependency and indemnity compensation program.

The pension amount depends on the composition of the surviving family and the physical condition of the surviving spouse. Pensions range in 1999 from \$490 a month for a surviving spouse without dependent children to \$935 a month for a spouse who is in need of regular aid and attendance and who has a dependent child. The pension is raised by \$124 a month for each additional dependent child.

Hospitalization and Other Medical Care

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides a nationwide system of

hospital and other medical care for veterans. Eligibility for any particular medical program is based on a variety of factors. Care is furnished to eligible veterans at these facilities according to two categories: "Mandatory" and "discretionary". Within these two categories, veterans with non-service-connected disabilities must also have limited income and resources to be eligible for cost-free medical care from the Department.

Care for dependents and survivors.—The dependents and survivors of certain veterans may be eligible for medical care under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) if not eligible for medical care under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) or Medicare. CHAMPUS is the health program administered by the Department of Defense for dependents of active duty personnel and military retirees and their dependents.

Beneficiaries covered by CHAMPVA may be treated at Department facilities when space is available. Usually, however, the person with CHAMPVA coverage is treated at a community hospital of his or her choice: The Department of Veterans Affairs pays for a part of the bill and the beneficiary is responsible for any required co-payment.

Nursing home care.—Eligibility for admission to a Department of Veterans Affairs nursing home is the same as that for hospitalization in a Department facility. Admission is based on a priority system—with the highest priority given to veterans requiring nursing home care for a service-connected condition. The Department of Veterans Affairs also contracts with community nursing homes to provide care at Department expense to certain veterans.

Outpatient medical treatment.—Extensive outpatient medical treatment is available to veterans: rehabilitation, consultation, training, and mental health services in connection with the treatment of physical and mental

disabilities. Outpatient care is furnished according to priority groups within the resources available to the facility.

Other medical benefits.—Other department of Veterans Affairs programs and medical benefits are available to certain eligible veterans: Domiciliary care for veterans with limited income who have permanent disabilities but who are ambulatory and able to care for themselves; alcohol and drug dependence treatment; prosthetic appliances; modifications in the veteran's home required by his or her physical condition, subject to prescribed cost limitations; and, for Vietnam-era veterans, readjustment counseling services. Under limited circumstances, the Department may authorize hospital care or other medical services in the community at Department expense.

Educational Assistance

The post-Vietnam Veterans' Educational Assistance program (VEAP) is a voluntary contributory matching program for persons entering service after December 31, 1976. The servicemember must have initially contributed to VEAP before April 1, 1987, to be eligible. The Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty program provides education benefits for individuals entering military service after June 30, 1985, and for certain other individuals. Servicemembers entering active duty have their basic pay reduced \$100 a month for the first 12 months of their service unless they specifically elect not to participate. An educational assistance program is also available for individuals who enter the Selected Reserve after June 30, 1985.

The Department of Veterans Affairs also pays educational assistance for dependents if a veteran is permanently and totally disabled from a service-related cause, or dies as a result of service or while completely disabled from service-related causes.